

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

FIRST 1,000 DAYS

2003–2006



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July 2007

United States
Department of Agriculture

Office of the Assistant
Secretary for Civil Rights

First 1,000 Days 2003–2006



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Message from the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights



Margo M. McKay

The Office is responsible for providing civil rights leadership and services for USDA. The Office is also responsible for ensuring that all USDA constituents have access to its programs and services and are treated equally, with respect and dignity.

It is my pleasure to issue the first report of the many accomplishments of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR). The Office is responsible for providing civil rights leadership and services for USDA—in its entirety—in a manner that blends and balances the Department’s employee diversity into an environment free from discrimination, harassment, intolerance, and reprisal. The Office is also responsible for ensuring that all USDA constituents have access to its programs and services and are treated equally, with respect and dignity.

The accomplishments that are being chronicled in this report were achieved under the direction of Vernon B. Parker, Esq., who was appointed on April 1, 2003, as the first Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, and served until February 2006. Shortly after his appointment, he began and convened many meetings with his senior advisors and began the challenging task of designing strategies for implementing institutional change within USDA’s civil rights organization. The environment for progress and change that he established

continues to help build the Department’s capacity to effectively serve the citizenry, reduce duplicative functions and programs, prevent civil rights complaints from employees and external groups, and support the President’s Management Agenda.

It is also my pleasure to serve as the second Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights and to build on the foundation created by Vernon Parker. The Office looks forward to an exciting future and to carrying out this important responsibility for the benefit of USDA and the Nation for years to come.

“About the Report” (see page 4) describes the contents of this report and the background for its issuance. As the Office continues to establish itself as a viable center to address new challenges presented by a professionally and technologically skilled and diverse workforce, we will also continue to reach out to those that have been traditionally underserved by the Department.

Margo M. McKay
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

Secretary's Message

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

As Secretary of Agriculture, I am firmly committed to ensuring the civil rights of all of USDA's customers and employees. Each person shall be treated with respect, dignity and equality. It is a standard I will continue to follow, and I expect each USDA employee to embrace this important commitment.

All employees and customers of USDA shall be free from reprisal or discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital or familial status, political beliefs, parental status, receipt of public assistance, or protected genetic information.

By our words and actions, each of us must demonstrate a commitment to equal opportunity for all individuals. We must strive for a workplace that respects differences and embraces diversity. Our programs and services must be accessible and delivered to all of our customers fairly and with dignity. There can be no exceptions or excuses. Together, we will continue to make the "People's Department" truly worthy of Abraham Lincoln's great vision.

Mike Johanns
Secretary



Mike Johanns

By our words and actions,
each of us must demonstrate
a commitment to
equal opportunity
for all individuals.

About the Report

Welcome to the inaugural Annual Report of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of Agriculture! On May 13, 2002, the pathfinding *Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002* was signed into law (Public Law 107-171). With it came the establishment of a new position, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, and subsequently ASCR. This signal action ushered in a new framework for transparency and accountability in the delivery of the Department's programs and services and was and is a clear call for the permanent elimination of the Department's reputation for discriminatory practices.

This report of the first 1,000 days since the advent of the Office, roughly the period May 2003 through August 2006, is a brief summary of its origins and many accom-

plishments. It is also a remarkable story of how coalition building, partnering, attention to cultural competence, and quality customer service can quickly become excellence in action. In several instances, the brief paragraphs do not fully represent the transformational change that has resulted from consistent, well-developed, and expertly implemented administrative operations and program outreach. To be sure, the first 1,000 days is a precursor of an enhanced public image for the Department.

The first section of the report includes a message from the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights and the Secretary of Agriculture. This section also describes the context of ASCR's beginnings, including its mission, goals, objectives, values, and structure. Included in this first section is a summary of the strategies to address the structural, systems, procedural, operations and accountability challenges faced by the fledgling Office. The sections that follow present highlights of the achievements of the Office of Civil Rights, Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center, Office of Outreach and Diversity, the USDA/1890 Program Office and the USDA/1994 Program Office.

We expect that future reports will be issued electronically, and will appear on the ASCR website, www.ascr.usda.gov.

This report helps convey how the future of the Nation, indeed the world, is inextricably intertwined with the extraordinary work of the Department and its partners in American agricultural enterprises. As you review it, we hope it will be evident that ASCR is helping to ensure that every USDA constituent is treated fairly, with dignity, respect, and cultural appreciation.

This report is also a remarkable story of how coalition building, partnering, attention to cultural competence, and quality customer service can quickly become excellence in action.



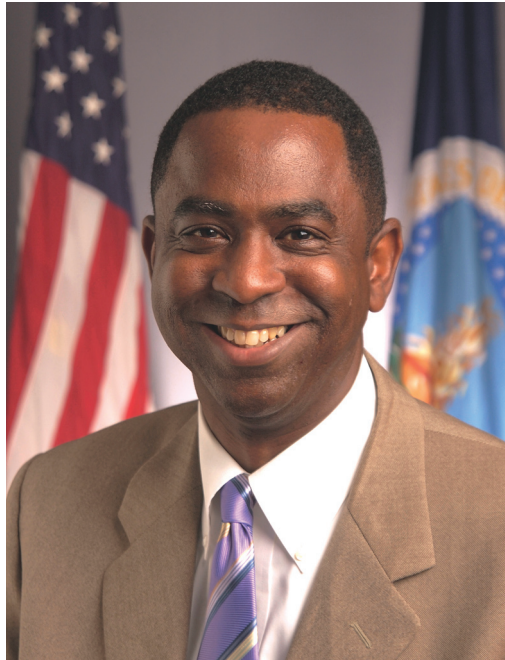
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Annabelle Romero and Secretary Mike Johanns discuss civil rights agenda.

Our Beginnings

On March 7, 2003, USDA established the position of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. The establishment of this position was the result of a transfer of functions from USDA's Departmental Administration to the Office of Civil Rights and was consistent with the recommendations made to the Secretary in September 2002 by the Working Group on Establishing the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. The Working Group sought input from USDA mission areas and agency management officials and recommended that actions be taken to clearly define roles and responsibilities and eliminate overlap between USDA's Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of Civil Rights.

The first Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Vernon B. Parker, Esq., was appointed on April 1, 2003. The functions within USDA's Office of Civil Rights, as well as the Office of Outreach, the Diversity Advisory Council, the 1890 Task Force, and conflict resolution activities, were assigned to the new Assistant Secretary. These transfers created a proactive civil rights agenda, placing a greater emphasis on prevention of civil rights complaints—external and internal.

Shortly after his appointment, Vernon Parker and his senior advisors began the challenging task of implementing institutional changes within USDA's reconfigured civil rights organization. During a 4-month period, Parker met with key management officials, employee organizations, constituency-based organizations, and Departmental and agency civil rights staffs. Following these meetings, Parker and his team identified



Vernon B. Parker

major challenges facing USDA in the areas of structure, systems, procedure, operations and accountability. They then developed an action plan to institute changes.

Following an in-depth assessment of the need to bring institutional change to the new office, the leadership reorganized its structure to focus on eliminating overlapping and duplicative functions within the agency, with focused concentration on preventing civil rights complaints. The reorganization expected to: 1) improve customer service and 2) address governmentwide initiatives, consistent with the President's Management Agenda.

The reorganization is expected to:

1. improve customer service and
2. address governmentwide initiatives, consistent with the President's Management Agenda.

Mission, Vision, And Values



MISSION

We provide leadership to promote equal opportunity, equal access, and fair treatment for all USDA employees and customers.

VISION

To be recognized as strategic partners, change agents, civil rights advocates, and highly effective leaders supporting the USDA mission.

VALUES

- We value our customers—both internal and external.
- We value upholding the civil rights of all USDA employees and customers. We value outstanding service and professionalism.
- We value clear communication.
- We value meeting customer expectations in a timely manner.
- We value confidentiality and fairness.
- We value teamwork and collaboration.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

ASCR has one unified strategic goal that supports the Department's strategic goals, objectives and management initiatives: To ensure USDA provides fair and equitable services and benefits to all customers and upholds the civil rights of its employees.

ASCR's mission is to ensure all agencies and programs of the USDA are in compliance with civil rights and related laws, coordinating the administration of civil rights laws and regulations for employees and participants of USDA programs.

The following objectives support achievement of this goal:

Objective 1: Strengthen partnerships between USDA and the 1890 community.

Objective 2: Strengthen partnerships between USDA and the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions.

Objective 3: Enhance the Office of the Secretary and Departmental Office employees' knowledge of the fairness, neutrality, and confidentiality of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) usage.

Objective 4: Ensure USDA agencies and offices are in compliance with USDA ADR regulations and governmentwide ADR laws and regulations.

Objective 5: Achieve an efficient USDA-wide outreach program for all customers.

Objective 6: Create and strengthen partnerships with community and faith-based organizations, corporations, foundations, educational institutions, and other targeted communities to build coalitions for USDA programs and opportunities.

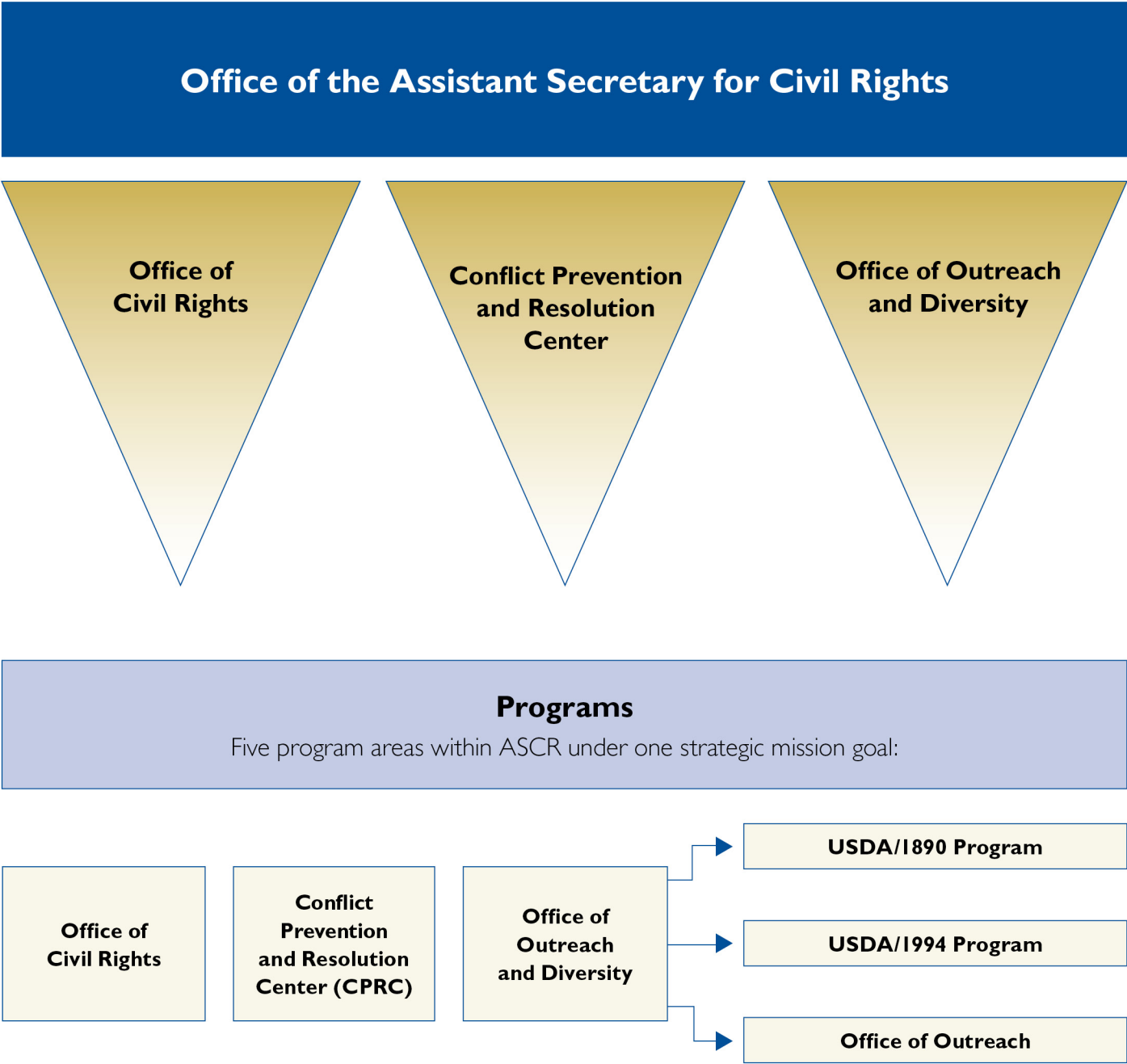
Objective 7: Increase the awareness of USDA programs and opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged and under-represented persons.

Objective 8: Develop and implement an efficient complaint process that adheres to civil rights laws and regulations.

Objective 9: Ensure USDA agencies and offices are in compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws.

Objective 10: Meet Equal Employment Opportunity Commission standards of a Model EEO Program.

Structure



Program Areas

OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

The Office of Civil Rights develops civil rights policy, provides coordination and leadership for equal opportunity and civil rights, provides technical assistance and training to USDA agencies, enforces compliance with applicable regulations, and investigates and resolves complaints of discrimination in USDA employment and in programs conducted or assisted by USDA.

CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION CENTER

The Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center helps USDA better handle conflict—workplace conflict, conflict with farmers or ranchers or any USDA customer, and conflict with other agencies. To reach this goal, CPRC focuses on two areas: (1) developing employee skills for managing conflict effectively and (2) using ADR methods to resolve disputes.

OFFICE OF OUTREACH AND DIVERSITY

The Office of Outreach and Diversity provides national leadership and coordination for programs and services across USDA to ensure equal and timely access to USDA programs for all constituents, with emphasis on the underserved.

USDA/1890 PROGRAMS

The USDA/1890 Programs attracts students into careers in agriculture and related fields; shares expertise and resources in areas such as agricultural research, extension and teaching programs, technology development, limited-resource farmers and minority farmer programs, and rural development programs; and increases the involvement of the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee University in the delivery of USDA programs.

USDA/1994 PROGRAMS

The USDA/1994 Programs provides funding for the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions to conduct nontraditional education and outreach activities to help meet the needs of the Native American people, and provides essential services to their communities. The program provides grant funds and encourages applications for the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (Tribal Colleges Extension Services) Program.

OFFICE OF OUTREACH

The Office of Outreach provides national leadership and coordination for programs and services across USDA to ensure equal and timely access to USDA programs for all constituents with emphasis on the underserved. Internally, the Office of Outreach is divided into two divisions: the Outreach Division, responsible for traditional outreach functions, and the Center for Minority Farmers, a new organizational component aimed at promoting minority farm products and facilitating memoranda of understanding, such as the recent pact with Marriot International, Inc.

Accomplishments

During its first few months, ASCR developed solutions to address the structural, systems, procedural, operations and accountability challenges identified. These solutions centered around 13 initiatives.

Structural Challenges encompassed organizational factors that impede the efficient delivery of civil rights services. In seeking solutions to these challenges, the focus was to consolidate like functions, eliminate overlap of responsibilities, prevent mission creep, and create a unified voice and line of authority.

There were two Civil Rights Initiatives under Structural Challenges:

1. Consolidation of staff offices with civil rights focus.
2. Realignment of personnel and functions within the Office of Civil Rights.

Systems Challenges were those linked with disassociated and outdated information management systems among USDA agencies. These systems were unable to communicate with each other and, consequently, required Herculean efforts to reconcile. Solutions focused on identification of an information management tool that stakeholders can agree upon and timely implementation of a systems solution.

The single Civil Rights Initiative under Systems Challenges called for a Civil Rights Enterprise System that integrated civil rights information management throughout USDA.

Procedural Challenges included development of standard operating procedures to improve the relationship between the Office of Civil Rights and other USDA units. A key need

was to include clear language on the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies within USDA pertaining to civil rights.

Operational Challenges encompassed processes and procedures internal to the Office of Civil Rights that interfered with efficient and effective delivery of services to our customers and stakeholders. The inventory of EEO complaints and program discrimination complaints had to be reduced and a system instituted that ensured timely service and the prevention of further complaints.

There were four Civil Rights Initiatives under Operational Challenges:

1. Improving customer service.
2. Complaint inventory reduction.
3. Increasing informal EEO complaint resolution rates.
4. Conducting a public awareness campaign.

Accountability Challenges were those associated with ensuring that USDA's customers, employees, and stakeholders understood the civil rights program. It became imperative that systems were put into place to prevent complaints whenever possible and to identify problem areas and personnel for corrective actions.

There were five Civil Rights Initiatives under Accountability Challenges:

1. Prevention of program complaints.
2. Prevention of EEO complaints.
3. Implementation of the No FEAR Act.
4. Implementing an accountability policy in personnel actions.
5. Establishing an annual Civil Rights Forum.

The focus was to consolidate like functions, eliminate overlap of responsibilities, prevent mission creep, and create a unified voice and line of authority.



Status of Initiatives

	Initiative	Description	Status	Comments
1	Consolidation of Functions with a Civil Rights Focus	The Diversity Advisory Councils, Outreach, Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center and the 1890 Program are now under the authority of the ASCR	Complete	A formal reorganization of the ASCR mission area effective July 11, 2005 resolved outstanding budget and staffing issues, as well as created a streamlined organization.
2	Realignment of Personnel and Functions in Civil Rights	Personnel were temporarily placed to most benefit reducing the pending inventory. The realignment was for October 1, 2003 through September 30, 2004.	Complete	The temporary realignment addressed inventory reduction for employment and program complaints.
3	Civil Rights Enterprise System	The Enterprise System will provide USDA with a web-based system to track, process and manage employment and program complaints and meet reporting requirements.	Ongoing	The 1st phase for employment complaints to complete. The 2nd phase for program complaints is on track for FY 2007 implementation.
4	Intradepartmental Relations	Creating and fostering appropriate relationships with other mission areas but in particular, the Office of General Counsel.	Ongoing	Regulations are being drafted to address the relationship between OGC and CR.
5	Improving Customer Service	Create a centralized unit to handle all incoming telephone calls with a referral to the proper CR division for action.	Complete	A fully staffed Customer Service Unit handles telephone, written and email inquiries and produces monthly status reports.
6	Complaint Inventory Reduction (Programs and employment)	A temporary solution to reduce the total number of open complaints and institutionalize a method to prevent future backlogs.	Complete	Employment and program complaints were significantly reduced and complaint processing times nearly met statutory timeframes.
7	Increasing Informal EEO Complaint Resolution Rates	Incorporate ADR into the informal EEO complaint process.	Complete	On April 5, 2006, an approved ADR policy was amended to enhance EEO and non-EEO ADR processes.
8	Public Awareness Campaign	Promote positive activities of ASCR by focusing on recipients/beneficiaries and employees.	Ongoing	Several public forums and listening sessions have been held to discuss partnerships, Minority Farm Registry, Notice of Farm Loan Application Receipts, and the new Farm Bill.
9	Prevention of Program Complaints	All USDA programs will be structured to become more accessible to socially and economically disadvantaged groups.	Ongoing	Three Partners' Meetings have been convened with several hundred community-based organizations and constituent groups to address minority farmers' access to farm loan programs and benefits.
10	Prevention of EEO Complaints	Reduce complaints filed by employees and applicants.	Ongoing	Training for managers on EEO responsibilities is mandatory. Employee development programs were implemented in FY 2005 and 2006.
11	Implementation of the No FEAR Act	Public Law 107-174 requires Federal agencies to be held accountable for violations of antidiscrimination laws.	Complete	All quarterly reports are being posted on time.
12	Implementing an Accountability Policy in Personnel Actions	The Office of Human Resources will ensure through policy that ALL USDA managers are held accountable for discriminatory actions toward recipients, beneficiaries, and employees.	Complete	An Accountability policy was approved for implementation by all USDA mission areas.
13	Establishing an Annual Civil Rights Forum	An annual Civil Rights Forum will train managers, practitioners on issues affecting the civil rights community, internal and external to USDA.	Complete	The 1st Annual Civil Rights Conference was held on April 19, 2006, with over 400 participants.

As evidenced in the status column of the preceding chart, ASCR achieved significant progress in addressing challenges during the first 1,000 days. Each program played key roles in making that happen.

Programs In Action



Office of Civil Rights

Inventory Reduction

By partnering with agencies, the Office of Civil Rights reduced the inventory of pending complaints to a manageable level during fiscal year 2004 and maintained a manageable level of cases during fiscal

year 2005. EEO complaint investigations were contracted out by the agencies and the use of ADR was significantly increased.

Customer Service Unit

The Customer Service Unit (unit) was established in 2004. The Unit serves as the point of contact between internal and external USDA customers and the Office of Civil Rights. It provides information such as complaint status and the procedures for filing a complaint. During calendar year 2005, the Unit managed 4,147 inquiries, 52 percent of which came from external customers. During the period following Hurricane Katrina, the unit served as a referral source assisting many individuals seeking information about Federal programs in the wake of the storm.

Employment Complaints

■ Complaints inventory at the beginning of FY2005	1,331
■ Number of complaints in inventory at end of FY2005	1,402
■ Number resolved	573
■ Percentage of investigations completed within 180 days or less	31

Program Complaints

■ Number of complaints at the beginning of FY2005	363
■ Number of complaints pending at end of FY2005	404
■ Number resolved	120

Resolution of Office of Inspector General Audits Findings

The Office of Civil Rights has worked diligently to resolve outstanding audit recommendations. Complaint processing was noted as a “Management Challenge” for several years in the Department’s Semi-Annual Report to Congress until it was removed in fiscal year 2005.

organizational culture, and to focus on customers and business processes. OIG determined during fiscal year 2005 that the Office of Civil Rights made significant progress in implementing actions to address program deficiencies and reduce the inventory of unresolved complaints.

From February 1997 to March 2000, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued 5 reports with 43 recommendations to improve management and administration of program and employee civil rights complaint processing and resolution. In response to OIG’s recommendations, the Office of Civil Rights developed a management plan to address its leadership and

No FEAR Act Annual Report

The Office of Civil Rights submitted its first Annual No FEAR Act Report to Congress. USDA is among the few Federal Agencies to submit this report, which analyzes trends in formal EEO complaint data, reports on reimbursements made to the Judgment Fund, and reports on disciplinary actions.

EEO Program Status Report

The Office of Civil Rights timely submitted its first MD-715 Report “EEO Program Status Report” for Fiscal Year 2004 to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in January 2005. The report provides workforce analysis, barrier

identification, tracking, and management reporting required by EEOC. In its plan to eliminate barriers to attaining the status of a model EEO agency, USDA identified six challenges and developed action plans for each challenge.

Six Challenges and Action Plan

Increase Representation of Minorities and Women in the Workforce

- Work with agency personnel directors to develop targeted recruiting efforts to increase the representation of minorities and women in the workforce.
- Encourage managers to take affirmative steps to recruit, hire, train, and promote employees from diverse backgrounds.
- Undertake comprehensive equal employment opportunity compliance review activities to monitor employment policies and practices.

Improve Retention of Minorities

- Identify factors contributing to the net decline of Black male and American Indian/Alaskan Native male and female employees and develop a strategy for addressing the factors within the Department’s control.

Increase Advancement Opportunities for Minorities and Women

- Ensure that promotions are made in an even-handed and nondiscriminatory fashion, and developmental assignments and training are provided to assist with career mobility.

Establish and Meet Hiring and Retention Goals for Employees With Targeted Disabilities

- Assist USDA components in setting goals for hiring individuals with targeted disabilities.
- Encourage agencies to recruit individuals with targeted disabilities by networking with professional and nonprofit organizations that can identify qualified candidates.
- Identify factors contributing to the high attrition among employees with targeted disabilities.
- Provide disability awareness training for managers and supervisors to improve recruitment, employment, advancement and retention of people with targeted disabilities.

Improve Timeliness in Complaint Processing

- Institutionalize the lessons learned from EEO complaint processing initiatives during fiscal year 2004 and the successful management controls used to achieve inventory reduction results.
- Process EEO complaints filed during fiscal year 2005 within statutory timeframes.

Promote a Workplace Free of Reprisal or Harassment

- Provide civil rights training to managers, supervisors, and other employees, and encourage the use of ADR techniques to resolve workplace disputes.
- Develop and implement an accountability process. Promote a climate of tolerance, mutual respect, and cultural sensitivity.

2006 Civil Rights Forum

Over 400 USDA employees attended the forum and participated in sessions on civil rights issues.

On April 18 and 19, 2006, ASCR held its first civil rights forum at the University of Maryland. The purpose of this forum was to provide civil rights training to USDA employees. Over 400 USDA employees attended the forum and participated in sessions on civil rights issues. Secretary Mike Johanns welcomed attendees with a keynote address. Other speakers included Linda Springer, Director,

Office of Personnel Management; Naomi C. Earp, Vice Chair, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Edith Primm, Justice Center of Atlanta; and Steve Nelson, Director, Office of Policy and Evaluation, United States Merit Systems Protection Board. During the forum, senior ASCR leadership met with representatives of Department employee organizations to discuss constituents' concerns.



Conflict Prevention and Resolution

Regulation Policy Amendments

On April 5, 2006, ASCR published a revised ADR Regulation. This regulation establishes the Department's policy on the use of ADR techniques designed to work towards preventing and resolving workplace and program conflicts within USDA.

The first ADR Regulation (July 20, 2001) required that ADR programs make mediation an option, that neutrals meet minimal standards, and that all ADR programs offer EEO complainants a choice of ADR programs.

In 2003, the ASCR directed CPRC to coordinate the development of EEO-related amendments to the original ADR regulation. These amendments became part of the plan to implement ASCR Initiative 7, "Increase Informal EEO Complaint Resolution Rates."

The regulation's amendments enhance the EEO ADR process and Departmental ADR commitment. Some of the changes were also aimed at improving non-EEO ADR.

In FY 2005, ASCR restarted the CPRC which provides ADR services for USDA's Departmental Administration, the Office of the Secretary, and ASCR. The program is a coordinated effort that works closely with ASCR's newly formed Civil Rights Service Division and concentrates on effective ADR in the workplace.

The CPRC Director is a member of the Interagency Alternative Dispute Resolution Working Group (IADRWG) Steering Committee. This group serves as the focal point in the Federal Government for ADR and was initially convened by the U.S. Attorney General. The purpose of the group is to facilitate, encourage, and coordinate dispute resolution in the agencies. During FY 2005, the IADRWG launched several projects and led initiatives aimed at furthering the understanding and practice of ADR. In one of these initiatives, the CPRC Director served on an intergovernmental panel. The Director's comments focused on the newly issued USDA ADR

Based on data collected by university researchers, ADR is effective and viewed quite positively by USDA users. ADR resulted in full or partial resolution of conflict over 70 percent of the time. More than half the participants expect their working relationships to improve, and approximately 70 percent of the participants report being satisfied with the overall outcome of the ADR. The researchers have also developed a protocol for conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the ADR program. Preliminary results show that the costs of conflict can be significant, and an effective ADR process can reduce those costs.

Key Provisions in the new ADR Regulation:

- To prevent conflicts whenever possible and to make every effort to resolve conflicts as early as possible,
- To offer ADR to EEO complainants in the informal EEO complaint process with only one narrow exception,
- To document the merit-based reasons for not offering ADR in the formal EEO process,
- To require management officials to participate in ADR in good faith,
- To require that ADR Awareness Programs be established for all USDA ADR programs,
- To require EEO counselors to collect and transmit certain case information to the EEO ADR program, and to make all ADR offers in writing and orally,
- To increase all mediator qualification requirements, and
- To establish clear ADR responsibilities for Sub-Cabinet officials and administrators, and other officials and employees.

regulation and how its provisions support management making good faith efforts to resolve conflicts.

Another initiative concerned a Federal governmentwide survey of ADR operations and how ADR furthers the President's Management Agenda. The ADR program, performance, and results information gathered from Federal Departments and Agencies, including USDA, is being consolidated into a report to the President from the U.S. Attorney General. The report meets IADRWG's requirement to evaluate ADR in the Federal sector.

Training

Two-Day Conflict Prevention and Dispute Resolution Conference:

CPRC developed and conducted a conflict prevention and resolution conference, held September 8-9, 2005, targeting USDA practitioners in the conflict management field, namely, ADR specialists, EEO counselors, and others interested in enhancing their ADR skills. The conference met an EEOC requirement for annual EEO com-

plaint training. Additionally, it fulfilled the annual 8-hour training requirement for USDA mediators. Fifty-five (55) attendees from 12 different agencies participated.

Mini-Conferences:

In FY 2005, CPRC conducted two half-day mini-conferences to enhance skills and share information among the ADR community within USDA. A panel of experts from the Federal Government and private sector presented information and responded to questions concerning the confidentiality provisions of the Administrative Dispute Resolution Act. The second conference dealt with achieving balance at the mediation table and was conducted by a leading conflict management authority, Dr. Richard Voyles. As a result of the two conferences, managers and specialists Departmentwide have enhanced their knowledge and improved their skills for handling confidentiality and power imbalance issues when intervening in conflict situations.

ADR Awareness/Conflict Management Skills Training:

CPRC is continuing its efforts to partner with the USDA Mission areas to promote the use of ADR as the primary method for dealing with conflict within USDA. On February 22, 2006, CPRC joined the Rural Development ADR office in providing conflict management training for new Foreign Agricultural Service employees. On June 21, 2006, the CPRC staff provided a second ADR Awareness and Conflict Management Training session for another group of FAS employees. The daylong training included a mock mediation by the CPRC staff and a basic overview of ADR, conflict management, and how cultural communication styles influence the way we personally handle conflict and the tools required to communicate more effectively.



Office of Outreach and Diversity

Established in 1997, the Office of Outreach was transferred to ASCR in February 2004, when many like functions were brought together under the ASCR umbrella. The Office of Outreach now has an expanded mission that the Department's outreach efforts go the extra mile, and are culturally sensitive and appropriate.

Outreach is viewed as those extraordinary efforts to communicate critical information to constituents where ordinary program delivery methods have proven ineffective. Its core functions are leadership, facilitation and coordination, communication (information dissemination), technical assistance, education and training, program delivery, research and evaluation, policy, planning, and administration.

Since May 2004, the staff has been creating holistic, comprehensive, seamless outreach programming while ensuring the uniqueness of the mission and purpose of each of the USDA agencies and offices involved in the outreach function. The ultimate outcome is to ensure that anyone who so desires has access to USDA's programs and services, and that constituents are treated equitably and fairly; and that the Department is held accountable for the actions—and non-actions—of its employees. Thus, the keystones of outreach are:

- Access to USDA programs by all who seek it;
- Equity in treatment; and
- Accountability for the actions of USDA staff.

Following is a summary of some of the accomplishments of the Office of Outreach.

Reports

Section 10708: The Annual Report of the Participation of Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers in USDA Programs

ASCR is the lead agency for implementing a major dimension of the *Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002*. The Act established two major new reporting requirements for the Department of Agriculture: (1) compilation and public disclosure of program participation data on farmers and ranchers and (2) public disclosure for county committee elections. These requirements are embedded within Section 10708 of the law, which in its entirety, requires the compilation and public disclosure of data to access and hold the Department of Agriculture accountable for the nondiscriminatory participation of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in the Department's programs.

In December 2004, the staff of the Office of Outreach took great pride in posting the first Section 10708 Report, covering participation rates for FY 2003, entitled *Bridging the Future—the 2003 Annual Report of the Participation of Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers in USDA Programs*. With the issuance of this signal report, the Department demonstrated its intent to respond to a legislative reporting mandate; and the Secretary was able to respond positively to the Senate Agriculture Committee about USDA's action on the legislation. The FY 2004 report was published in April 2006. The FY 2005 report is now being prepared for publication. The reports are published in hard copy and electronic format. The electronic format is accessible via the ASCR website www.ascr.usda.gov/reports.html.



Outreach is viewed as those extraordinary efforts to communicate critical information to constituents where ordinary program delivery methods have proven ineffective.

Transparency requires
USDA to provide
opportunities for socially
disadvantaged farmers and
ranchers to participate in
USDA programs for which
they are eligible.

The importance of Section 10708 is that it mandates both transparency and accountability in the participation of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in the programs of USDA. The inclusion of both transparency and accountability suggests how Congress intends the provision to be implemented. Transparency in program delivery requires that USDA collect demographic data on program participants, and make such participation data available to the public. Moreover, transparency requires USDA to provide opportunities for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to participate in USDA programs for which they are eligible. Accountability requires USDA to ensure programs are free from discrimination.

Building Partnerships

Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)

Between 2003 and 2006, the Department entered into three formal partnerships that used the Office of Outreach as the implementing unit.

USDA/League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

USDA/League of United Latin American Citizens, founded in 1929, is the largest and oldest Hispanic nonprofit organization in the United States; it has a membership of approximately 117,000. LULAC helps to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, and civil rights of Hispanic Americans through community-based programs operating at more than 700 LULAC councils nationwide. Since the late 1970s, USDA and LULAC have been working together.

In July 2004, former Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman and former LULAC National President Hector M. Flores signed an open-ended MOU, known as “Juntos Podemos” (Together We Can), which provides a framework to help strengthen USDA’s relationships and outreach activities with educational institutions and professional and community-based organizations (CBO). It also provides resources for the

continued development and advancement of the Hispanic community overall. An inter-agency work group implements the MOU and includes representation from USDA Outreach, Civil Rights, and program staff.

USDA/Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

In December 2004, USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services executed a MOU for the purpose of coordinating policies and activities designed to improve the economic conditions of refugees and other low-income individuals engaged in farming and rural entrepreneurship. The MOU titled “New Growth Partnerships” is being implemented between two offices within DHHS—the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Office of Community Services and ASCR. The USDA/DHHS partnership is designed to reduce the challenges and expand opportunities within agriculture for the small farmer/rancher and rural entrepreneur. Issues such as higher productivity, production consistent with market opportunities, marketing, financing and land acquisition are important issues for refugees, all of which can be made easier through USDA/DHHS collaboration.

USDA/Marriott International, Inc.

Marriott International, Inc., and USDA entered into a 3-year agreement in March 2004 to enhance business opportunities for minority farmers and to expand their business capacity through specialized outreach, technical assistance, and training. The goal is to substantially increase the number of minority farmers to sell produce to the hospitality industry. Other outcomes include increased and sustained participation of minority farmers in production, and marketing to the hospitality industry, and other aspects of the food and agriculture system. Training orientation and activities were held for community-based organizations, Cooperative Extension personnel, and farmers. Marriott and USDA program staff participated in these activities.



Partners Meetings

The Office of Outreach hosted the Second and Third Annual USDA/CBO Partners Meetings in Washington, DC, during the first week in August of 2005 and 2006. These meetings are a keystone in strengthening the relationship between CBOs and USDA, and signals a new era in working together. The conference is a means to ensure purposeful dialogue focused on meaningful change and is designed to identify strategies that hold promise for improving the long-term well-being of small and minority farmers and ranchers in agriculture, and the rural towns within which many farmers and ranchers live.

More than 400 individuals have participated in some aspect of the 3-day conferences, the centerpiece of which is a

series of “conversations,” all addressing critical issues impacting the well-being of small, minority, and limited-resource farmers.

Over the 2-year period, USDA and CBO representatives have held conversations on:

1. equitable access to USDA programs and services;
2. enhancing resources and land access for small farmers, ranchers, farmworkers, and small towns in rural areas;
3. risk management, marketing and food safety;
4. community food security and nutrition assistance;
5. implications of animal identification for small-scale producers;
6. traditional conservation, land stewardship and cooperative conservation;
7. farmworkers, USDA and U.S. agriculture;

8. grants, cooperative agreements and partnerships;
9. disaster preparedness and policy;
10. foreclosures, accelerations, and land fractionation;
11. new entry, young, and women farmers;
12. county committee elections process;
13. higher value crops and higher value markets;
14. 2007 Census of Agriculture;
15. the 2501 Program (Outreach to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers);
16. Cooperative Extension Programs; and
17. infrastructure and rural development.

USDA's highest administrators, including the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Secretary's Chief of Staff, Under Secretaries, and Agency Heads participated in these meetings. Representatives of more than 30 CBOs and 18 USDA agencies and offices have participated in partners meeting; CBO participants have represented more than 25 States nationwide.

USDA-wide Conference Coordination

In 2005, USDA began coordinating major national outreach related conferences at the Department level. This initiative created opportunities to increase awareness about programs and services offered by USDA, while leveraging limited resources. Agencies of the Department endorsed the Conference Coordination concept which holds potential for the Department to reach new heights in its participation in national conferences that reach thousands of the Nation's citizenry, especially those who are underserved. The 2005 Conference Coordination schedule featured 16 conferences over an 8-month period, and involved ensuring a presence for the Department at meetings of well-known organizations that represent African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, and Hispanic Americans. Through Conference Coordination, USDA senior officials and program staff made approximately 100,000 direct



contacts with minority populations and indirect contacts of more than 1 million persons in the targeted underserved and disadvantaged communities.

The success of the initiative was driven by the work of an interagency USDA-wide Conference Coordination Team, support from agency administrators, by building coalitions and collaborating with 19 agencies/offices, and by involving a cross-section of agency employees who represented the Department at the conferences; it was under-girded by well-defined procedures and work tools. Among the conferences included in the initial offering were those of the Hmong National Development Association, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Association of Asian Americans Professionals (NAAAP), National Council of La Raza, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), U.S. Conference of Mayors, Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE), Blacks in Government, Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC), National Urban League, and Federally Employed Women (FEW).

Customer Service, Technical Assistance, and Training

Serving Small and Minority Farmers, Ranchers, and Landowners

Over the course of 3 years, USDA held training sessions and workshops to improve the capacity of small and minority farmers, ranchers, and landowners. For example:

- **USDA Hispanic Small Farmers and Ranchers Training and Listening Forum (Salinas, CA, March 3 and McAllen, TX, March 30, 2005):**

ASCR in collaboration with USDA State offices coordinated and participated in training forums and listening sessions. The purpose of the sessions was to provide training so that underserved customers are aware of programs and financial assistance. The training also provided a listening and feedback ses-

sion so that farmers could express their concerns to USDA officials—helping to ensure that the necessary steps to address them are taken. The participants had the opportunity to address their concerns to the ASCR, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services, FSA Associate Administrator, and other State officials from Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development. One hundred Hispanic producers were in attendance in California, 40 of which required translation services. About 35 Hispanic producers were in attendance in Texas; very little translation was required.

- **National Association of Latino/Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers (NALHFR) First Annual Conference (August 25–27, 2005, Las Cruces, NM):** The alliance between Latino/Hispanic farmers and ranchers in the United States was strengthened, as well as a networking opportunity among all sponsoring government agencies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and universities. Together they investigated current policy issues.

Gay and Lesbian Advisory Council (GLEAC)

Ensuring Respect, Dignity and Equality.

Under the umbrella of ASCR, GLEAC's sexual orientation nondiscrimination awareness program has been completed, including the development and production of video vignettes used to facilitate discussion. GLEAC and USDA Office of Communications' Broadcast Media and Teleconferencing Center received national recognition for the quality and effectiveness of the video vignettes. The recognition included three signal awards: the *2005 Telly Award*, *2004 Communicator Award*, and the *National Association of Government Communicators Award*.

The purpose of the sessions was to provide training so that underserved customers are aware of programs and financial assistance.

Outreach Strategies

ASCR staff worked diligently to initiate several innovative strategies to hear the concerns of disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, landowners, and others across the United States. These included:

Listening Sessions—meetings with representatives of the Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American disadvantaged farm and ranch communities, convened in partnership with minority-serving institutions and community-based organizations (CBO's). These sessions were held in Lorman, MS; Orangeburg, SC; Ft. Valley, GA; Fresno, CA; and in several cities in New Mexico. In each instance, approximately 100 or more individuals participated in these sessions, taking the opportunity to tell senior administrators and Under Secretaries of their deeply held beliefs about access to USDA programs and services.

2007 Farm Bill Briefing Sessions—a series of meetings across the United States to hear from the public about legislative changes they desired for the 2007 Farm Bill. These sessions were also viewed as more effective strategies to bring the concerns of small and minority producers to bear on policy-making decisions related to small farms.

Minority Farm Register—The Register, launched in August 2004, promotes equal access to USDA farm programs and related farm services for minority farmland owners, farmers, ranchers, tenants, and other individuals who participate in agriculture. Those who register receive information or personal contact through USDA outreach efforts. The program is a joint program of USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Office of Outreach. More than 2,000 individuals have voluntarily signed up for the Register.

Since 2003, GLEAC and ASCR have officially recognized June as Gay & Lesbian Pride Month and sponsored a special emphasis observance for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) employees. These observances contribute to the creation of a workplace that respects differences and embraces diversity. They reinforce the Department's Civil Rights Policy Statement, which states that each person shall be treated with respect, dignity, and equality.

In early 2004, GLEAC began conducting sexual orientation nondiscrimination awareness sessions. Since that time GLEAC has conducted many sessions for USDA agencies and customers. And has been an active participant in various civil rights conferences, diversity events, management meetings and employee training seminars addressing sexual orientation issues in the Federal workplace. To date, almost 1,000 USDA employees, partners, and customers have participated in GLEAC-presented sexual orientation nondiscrimination awareness sessions.

GLEAC has collaborated with other Federal organizations to provide sexual orientation nondiscrimination awareness training. The Minneapolis and Boston Federal Executive

Boards have invited GLEAC to participate in their diversity-related training events.

Employees from several different Federal agencies in Minnesota and Massachusetts have attended GLEAC's sexual orientation nondiscrimination awareness program.

GLEAC has expanded its role as the Department's primary resource for sexual orientation work-related issues. During the past 3 years, GLEAC has received numerous requests from various USDA agencies and employees, seeking information and guidance on workplace issues regarding sexual orientation. GLEAC has also acted as a technical resource in ADR and Early Intervention sessions.

Environmental Justice

Outreach staff served on several Federal Interagency Working Groups (IWGs) that ensured compliance with Presidential Executive Orders (EO) relating to environmental justice. Environmental justice means not only protecting human health and the environment for all, but ensuring that all people and communities are treated fairly and given the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Ensuring Diversity

ASCR proactively pursues its mission to reach populations under-represented in USDA's workforce. For example, Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are under-represented in the USDA workforce. (AAPIs made up 2.5 percent of the USDA workforce while they represent 4.4 percent in the general population.) Successful implementation of the USDA mission depends on a diverse workforce that reflects the ethnic makeup of the general population.

As such, ASCR conducted outreach activities focusing on the AAPI community by participating in conferences such as Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC), Organization of Chinese Americans, Federally Employed Women, Minority Association of Natural Resources and Related Sciences Conference, and North American Association of Asian Professionals.

The Department also used television and other media to bring more overall diversity into the USDA workforce. ASCR arranged career days at various college campuses, presenting USDA a great opportunity to showcase its programs and establish a network of potential employees.

ASCR also held the AAPI Heritage Month Observances. These celebrations promote cultural awareness among employees and enhance the understanding of a particular culture or race. Every year, the Department celebrates Asian Pacific Heritage with special guests, food, displays of arts and crafts, and cultural performances.

Bridging Gaps

During ASCR's first 1,000 days, numerous career development conferences were conducted nationwide to help ensure a more skilled workforce to face the new challenges of the work environment and to increase diversity.

The conference workshops included:

- Preparing for a career in the Senior Executive Service
- Looking beyond stereotypes
- Public speaking and presentation
- Help your career with a mentor or coach
- Writing an exceptional resume
- Understanding multicultural behavior in the workplace
- Hitting a home run with your job interview
- Effective networking for career advancement
- Managing conflicts at work
- Stress management
- Networking and interpersonal skills
- Writing through critical thinking
- Conflict management and interpersonal skills
- Present your way to success

The Department believes that this proactive approach ultimately prevents and reduces the filing of complaints which often develop because of a lack of communication and understanding of another point of view.

USDA/1890

National Scholars Program

Since 2003, ninety-two students have been selected as USDA/1890 National Scholars, including 18 for the 2006 academic year. The Program is a partnership initiative between USDA and the 1890 Land-Grant Universities, under the leadership of ASCR. Through this initiative, USDA seeks to expand its diversity by recruiting talented students into public service in agriculture and related fields, including food sciences, natural resources, and agricultural sciences. Established in October 1992, the program awards scholarships to students who study agriculture, food, or natural resource sciences and related majors at one of the 18 universities.

The 1890 Land-Grant Universities include: Alabama A&M University; Alcorn State University, MS; Delaware State University; Florida A&M University; Fort Valley State University, GA; Kentucky State University; Langston University; Lincoln University, MO; North Carolina A&T University; Prairie View A&M University, TX; South Carolina State University; Southern University, LA; Tennessee State University; Tuskegee University, AL; University of Arkansas Pine Bluff; University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Virginia State University; and West Virginia State University.

Scholarship recipients receive full tuition, fees, books, use of laptop computer, software, printer, USDA employment, including employee benefits for each of the four years they pursue a bachelor's degree. Students receive room and board provided by the partnering universities and are required to work one year at USDA for each year of the scholarship. During the first 1,000 days of the ASCR, interest in the National Scholars

USDA/1890 Scholarships 2003–2006

Year	Number of Students Who Applied	# Selected
2006	107	18
2005	133	25
2004	63	30
2003	67	19





Programs increased substantially. The mission of the land-grant system is teaching, research, and extension (outreach). Since its inception, the USDA/ 1890 National Scholars Program has awarded approximately 400 scholarships to students to study agriculture, food, or natural resource sciences and related disciplines.

Orientation training is held each year in July to familiarize the newly selected scholars with USDA. In 2006, 18 scholars were paired with mentors from both USDA and the 1890 Land-Grant Universities to participate in three full days of developmental activities at the National Conference Center in Lansdowne, VA. These activities were designed to provide the scholars with a general understanding of the roles, regulations, and policies pertaining to Federal employment.

The program helps to strengthen the partnership between USDA and the 1890 universities; helps to increase the number of students studying agriculture and related disciplines; and offers career opportunities at USDA. Through the recruiting efforts of the liaison

officers, students are able to apply for the USDA/1890 National Scholarship Program. Students selected as USDA/1890 National Scholars become employees of the sponsoring USDA agency.

ASCR is providing financial assistance to Alcorn University to develop a recruitment video for the 1890 university system to assist USDA with its human capital needs. The 5- to 7-minute video will highlight opportunities available to aspiring students at 1890 Land-Grant Universities.

These activities were designed to provide the scholars with a general understanding of the roles, regulations, and policies pertaining to Federal employment.

Proof the Scholars Program Works:

Each year, liaison officers visit junior and senior high schools; participate in career activities in the community; and attend job fairs to inform, motivate and recruit students for careers at USDA in agriculture, food or natural resource sciences and related majors. Since 1993, the Agricultural Liaison Officers efforts have resulted in over 200 students being converted to full-time USDA employees; 38 have been converted since 2003.

USDA/1890 Liaison Officer Program

Building an Effective Team

The USDA/1890 Liaison Officer Program consists of USDA employees who are assigned to the 1890 institutions as USDA representatives. They provide inter-agency coordination, recruit high school students, and foster better communication between the institutions and USDA. The

liaison officers also coordinate programs of curriculum development, recruit and counsel students on USDA employment opportunities, and develop new approaches to reach small-scale, limited-resource and minority farmers.

From October 31–November 4, 2005, training was provided to 15 USDA/ 1890 Agricultural Liaison Officers and their university supervisors, while they were on Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) assignments to the 1890 Land-Grant Universities. The workshop focused on teambuilding and included sessions on managing conflict and differences of opinions, and collaborating across boundaries. This workshop, facilitated by the Office of Personnel Management, was the first teambuilding session since the new Liaison Officers were selected for their assignments.

Congressional Relations

On April 30, 2006, President Bush visited Tuskegee University to launch the American Competitiveness Initiative, a new Federal program committing \$136 billion over 10 years to scientific research and innovation. Lenora Haynes, Agricultural Liaison Officer; Hope Clay and Alex Grant, both USDA/1890 National Scholars, and approximately 300 college administrators, faculty and students were selected to hear the President outline the details of the program.

Scholarships for Displaced Students Due to Hurricane Katrina

USDA, ASCR, in conjunction with other USDA Mission Areas, provided funding to Alcorn University and Southern



University and A&M College in the amount of \$38,000 each to assist students impacted by Hurricane Katrina. This was a one-time scholarship used for books, fees, and other related expenses for students who are now attending those universities.

Southern University sponsored over 800 students from 12 different universities in the New Orleans area, including Dillard, Xavier, and Southern University-New Orleans. Alcorn State University awarded funds ranging from \$100-\$1,400 to 61 students affected by the hurricane's destruction.

The Hurricane Katrina Committee at Alcorn University (Clifton Peters, Agricultural Liaison Officer is a member) was instrumental in the following accomplishments:

- Identifying students at Alcorn University and Purdue University to assist with a spring break work session to do clean up and repair work on the Gulf Coast
- Securing 96 computers from USDA to provide technological reconnection to the communities impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

The Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Training Institute USDA Donates Surplus Computers to Southern University

On behalf of ASCR, Thelma Floyd, Director, USDA/1890 Programs, participated in the Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Training Institute, held in Baton Rouge, LA, January 19-21, 2006. ASCR, in coordination with USDA property office, presented 30 surplus computers to Southern University for the Leadership Training Institute.

The Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Training Institute was established through a 2-year grant awarded by USDA to Southern University. The objective of the Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Training Institute is to promote small and

family farm sustainability through enhanced decision-making skills and leadership development. This will be achieved by helping farmers become better leaders while enhancing their farm management skills.

Providing Technical Support to Improve the Genetics of Meat

During the previous 2 years, Orlando Phelps, USDA Agricultural Liaison Officer, Southern University and A&M College, provided technical assistance to a Tennessee State University research project being conducted at Fort Valley State University. Dr. Richard Browning, Associate Professor and Project Director, requested Phelps' assistance based on his expertise and knowledge related to meat goat, live and carcass evaluation, harvesting and fabrication. Phelps has an extensive background in these areas and was instrumental in developing the live animal and carcass descriptions used by USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Livestock and Seed Program personnel in evaluating meat goats. His expertise and background were also used in developing the Interim Institutional Meat Purchasing Specification for Goat available for use in the domestic and international marketing of goat. Data from this project is currently being analyzed and will be presented at various scientific meetings in the United States. and internationally. This data will be beneficial in improving the selection of goats within the industry.

Team Agricultural Georgia Committee Meeting

On January 19, 2006, Neal Leonard, USDA Agricultural Liaison Officer at Fort Valley State University, participated in the Team Agricultural Georgia (TAG) committee meeting in Athens, GA. The purpose of the TAG committee meeting was to discuss the various outreach strategies that can be used to help advertise USDA programs and benefits.

The objective of the Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Training Institute is to promote small and family farm sustainability through enhanced decision-making skills and leadership development.

The initial workshop
focused on building
successful teams by
enhancing the
communication between
individuals and groups
working to achieve
similar goals.

The USDA Food and Agriculture Council in Georgia created TAG in 1995 to further cooperation, share resources, and promote change that benefits the State's agricultural community. Neal Leonard currently serves as the project funding coordinator for TAG.

Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Training

The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AgCenter) held the inaugural session of the Small Farmer Agricultural Leadership Training Institute October 27–29, 2005, in Baton Rouge, LA.

Dr. Dawn Mellion-Patin, Project Director, designed the Institute to assist small farmers in developing their leadership skills to assist their rural communities.

The AgCenter partnered with Heifer International beef cattle groups throughout Louisiana to provide assistance in their marketing efforts. The initial workshop focused on building successful teams by enhancing the communication between individuals and groups working to achieve similar goals. Future workshops will focus on marketing options, adding value to livestock operations, establishing successful cooperatives, and presenting a desirable animal to customers. These workshops are a result of a

USDA Risk Management Agency grant. There were 26 participants from 11 States across the Southwest and Southeast.

Clyde Thompson, Associate Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, participated and critiqued the initial session to help ensure the project meets its mission. Orlando Phelps, Agricultural Liaison Officer at Southern University, assisted in developing the 2501 proposal grant and will assist in carrying out the project over the next 2 years.

Small Farmers Leadership Training Conference

On February 15–18, 2006, Linda Oliphant, National Special Program Manager, ASCR; Horace Hodge, Agricultural Liaison Officer at Prairie View A&M University; and Orlando Phelps, Agricultural Liaison Officer, Southern University, participated in the Small Farmers Leadership Development Conference hosted by Prairie View A&M University. The conference included a tour to the “Blue Bell Creamy” Dairy Farm and training in the areas of: Diversity, Using Computers in Agriculture Presentations, Agricultural Business Planning, Creating a Resource Inventory for Your Agricultural Enterprise and Team Building. Twenty-one small farmers are participating in this 2501 Program sponsored project.

USDA/1994 Program

Former Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Vernon B. Parker proposed that the USDA/American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) Working Group formed via a 1998 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) become a permanent Federal program under ASCR. In January 2005, that proposal was accepted.

The Tribal College Liaison position and advisory group in the MOA are now established under USDA's ASCR–Office of Outreach and Diversity. USDA and AIHEC established the Tribal Liaison position and advisory group in 1998 to carry out the mandate of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 to

establish programs to ensure that tribally controlled colleges and universities and American Indian/Alaska Native communities equitably participate in USDA employment, programs, services and resources.

In 2006, the USDA Tribal Liaison position was upgraded to a permanent Federal National Director 1994 Programs job, placing it in a parallel structure with other existing USDA Minority-Serving Institutions' Liaisons, like those in USDA's 1890 Land-Grant Institutions in ASCR.

In 2006, ASCR elevated advisory group members to decision-makers from each USDA Mission Area and political represen-



ASCR continues to collaborate with partnering agencies to address challenges and barriers to USDA programs and services experienced by the American Indian/ Native communities, which hold the status of Sovereign Nations.

tation, with an equal number of Tribal College Presidents, increasing members from each side from six to eight.

Partnerships and Collaborations

ASCR collaborates with the AIHEC President and Deputy Executive Director in building a USDA/1994 Programs Office and program elements under ASCR, such as the future USDA/1994 National Scholars Program. USDA and AIHEC advisory group Co-Chairs worked closely in 2006 with the Acting Tribal College Liaison and high-level ASCR staff to plan the winter meeting, attended by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Advisory group work includes:

- developing a strategic plan;
- recommending ways USDA can strengthen partnerships and communications with and eliminate disparate funding for 1994 Land-Grant Institutions;
- informing USDA about Tribal College needs, challenges and emerging issues;
- advising ASCR how to develop a USDA/ 1994 National Scholars Program to fit Tribal College student needs, future Regional Tribal College Liaison positions, train and retain youth in tribal communities to be leaders and increase the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) workforce in the food and agricultural sciences; and
- help Tribal Colleges with facility and equipment improvement, priority community and environmental issues.

ASCR, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and AIHEC are developing a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen educational and research capacity in Tribal Colleges.

ASCR consults with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which has an established scholarship program for AI/AN students, as the future USDA/1994 National Scholars Program is developed under ASCR.

ASCR recognizes the importance of ensuring that Tribal Colleges equitably participate in USDA employment, programs, services, and resources resulting from USDA and AIHEC collaborations. Further, the Secretary of Agriculture's attendance at the 2006 winter meeting of the advisory group's deliberation further conveyed the Department's commitment to Tribal Colleges.

ASCR collaborated with USDA's Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service on a tip sheet to help 1994 Institutions and other minority-serving institutions to write more competitive grant proposals. ASCR also identified Web-based diabetes prevention and control information targeted specifically to American Indian/ Alaska Native audiences from the National Institutes of Health National Diabetes Education Program to share with AIHEC member Tribal Colleges and Universities. AIHEC has communicated that Tribal College President Advisory Group Members feel positive about ASCR.

Toward the Future

Ensuring Success Strategically

ASCR maintains a varied mission. It continues to evolve and is impacted by events, legislation, and new roles and responsibilities. During our first 1,000 days, these drivers propelled the development of a new ASCR Strategic Plan that followed a sweeping new organizational design that further eliminated redundancies throughout the Department, placing ownership, accountability, responsibility and leadership for civil rights and EEO firmly under the control of ASCR. In so doing, we have effectively laid out a vision for effective internal management and business functions that support the accomplishment of our goal.

What will ASCR need to do to continue to succeed? How will we know if we have been successful? What are the challenges we will face? Will we be ready for those challenges?

There is no way to predict the future, but it is possible to identify and forecast the forces of change shaping the Department and the challenges facing ASCR in helping the Department meet its mission. It is the Strategic Plan and the metrics we established to gauge our success that will allow us to adjust and modify our strategies so that we can continue to deliver the best possible performance for USDA.



There is no way to predict the future, but it is possible to identify and forecast the forces of change shaping the Department and the challenges facing ASCR in helping the Department meet its mission.

Our employees and leaders are pivotal to assuring our success. That is why ASCR developed the Strategic Human Capital Plan and the Leadership Succession Management Plan. After closely examining current workforce; trends affecting mission delivery; external, internal, and crosscutting mission drivers; external partnerships; and critical skills, ASCR identified mission critical occupations and specific strategies that will close skill gaps. In so doing, we have effectively laid out a vision for effective internal management and business functions that support goal accomplishment.

Our plan establishes a framework and guideposts for achieving human capital management excellence within ASCR, and enhances our efficiency and effectiveness in reaching the Department's strategic goals. A number of activities will need to be accomplished in the near term to guarantee we have the internal capacity necessary to achieve our mission. We will need to close identified skill gaps in our mission critical occupations. We cannot solely rely on recruitment, development and retention strategies that served us well in the past. The analysis conducted during the development of this plan identified unique challenges requiring us to devise innovative recruitment and retention strategies. We will need to forecast and fund educational and developmental activities that link to the competency requirements of our workforce, so they are better prepared to meet our strategic goals and objectives.

Developing a strategic vision and future for the Department and ensuring employees have the capacity to advance the Department's strategic initiatives have never been more important. Today's emerging workforce issues are vastly different from those a decade ago. Technological advancements,

economic growth, and demographic shifts are reshaping the American workplace. Ethnic and racial minority groups will continue to grow at a rapid pace, and more people with disabilities are joining the workforce. Our workforce is also aging as America's "baby boom" generation redefines attitudes and expectations toward work and retirement. America's younger workers no longer look to a single, long-term employer for job security. These social, economic and demographic trends have important implications for USDA and the work it performs. Our strategic plans have been designed to integrate all of our EEO and civil rights efforts and responsibilities to help the Department keep pace with these dynamic changes. Given the challenges and varied mission responsibilities of the Department, our current workforce will need to enhance its competencies and skills which will shape the hiring, training, and performance skills of employees to successfully carry out the Department's and the ASCR's goals.

We understand the importance of a healthy USDA climate toward allowing all employees to be successful in meeting the Department's objectives, and we will inform the workforce of the benefits of alternative methods of resolving workplace and programmatic disputes. We have important regulatory oversight responsibilities, and we will work toward ensuring agencies and offices understand the various statutes and regulations that govern ADR, civil rights and EEO, and that they receive assistance in complying with these authorities. We will adhere to legally mandated and regulatory timelines for completing actions associated with both EEO and program complaints.

Thanks for all that you achieved during our first 1,000 days!

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